

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa,
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*Raised Bill 461, An Act Concerning Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs,
March 3, 2008***

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee, I am Gretchen Raffa, Community Organizer for Planned Parenthood of Connecticut. Please accept our thanks for raising Bill 461, *An Act Concerning Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs*, and for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. All too often, the health of adolescents is taken less seriously than the health of younger children, and it is refreshing to see your concern for the unique health and social concerns of teenagers. Young people have the right to accurate sexual health information that can protect their health and save their lives. Access to accurate, complete sexual health information is a human right.

The interest of Planned Parenthood in this bill is to make certain that any funds appropriated through this bill for incentive grants be earmarked specifically to help improve the ability of those school districts *who are interested and willing*, to improve their delivery of comprehensive sexuality education. By this we mean information that will specifically and increasingly through the school years, help students understand not just the basics of puberty and how human reproduction occurs, but how sexually transmitted diseases and HIV are contracted, how to prevent pregnancy either by abstinence or the use of contraception, how to evaluate healthy and unhealthy relationships, avoid sexual abuse and other risky behaviors, and how to take personal responsibility for their own sexual health. This information is urgently needed. We know that 80,000 teens in state schools told the DPH CT Health Survey in 2005 that they were sexually active, most starting to have sex between ages 13 and 16.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 56% of American females and 60% of American males initiate sex by the time they are 18. Teen pregnancy, while largely on a downturn over the past decade or two, may be increasing somewhat in some parts of the country and the state. Several communities, notably New London and New Haven, have recently re-focused their attention to teen pregnancy in their cities. In both cases, these cities have renewed their commitment to comprehensive sexuality education, and to involving parents in the conversation about their kids' sexual health, as a part of their response. These two cities are great examples of communities that are already investing local energy in addressing this issue, and would likely make excellent use of incentive grants to ramp up their efforts.

We know that parents want and expect their children to be getting sexual health information in school. Through the grants to schools that would be funded in this bill, parents could get help learning how to talk about sexuality with their children in an age appropriate and positive manner. This bill should also fund teacher training in how to deliver sex education in the classroom that is medically sound, and while cautionary, doesn't employ the use of fear or judgment to elicit certain behaviors.

Planned Parenthood strongly supports bill 461, with the specific understanding that the funds appropriated for health education be a resource to schools that want to do a better job teaching comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education. Thank you.